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ABSTRACT

From April 1994 through December 1998, with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) worked with civic organizations, parliament, and political parties to conduct democratic development programs in Albania. NDI conducted education programs in cooperation with its Albanian partner organization, the Society for Democratic Culture (SDC). In addition, NDI and SDC made significant contributions to Albanian electoral processes during this period. With guidance from NDI, SDC designed and implemented civic awareness programs to help educate citizens and elected officials on issues such as the role of women in politics, local government administration, and community organizing. SDC reached citizens across the country using nationwide television broadcasts, radio transmissions, public meetings, and a monthly newsletter. Since 1992, it has consistently mobilized thousands of volunteers to monitor the election process. Recognizing the need for public participation in the democratic system and dialogue on policy questions, NDI worked to foster communication among and between Albanian citizens and elected officials by conducting programs focusing on members of Parliament, political party leaders, and government officials. NDI's programming was severely limited due to separate crises in 1997 and 1998 that prompted NDI to close its Tirana (Albania) office on both occasions. (BT)

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Albania: Civic Education and Parliamentary Training
April 1, 1994 to June 30, 1999
Final Report

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FINAL REPORT
ALBANIA: CIVIC EDUCATION AND PARLIAMENTARY TRAINING
USAID Cooperative Agreement EUR-A-0094-00028-00
April 1, 1994 to June 30, 1999

I. SUMMARY

From April 1994 through December 1998, with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) worked with civic organizations, parliament and political parties to conduct democratic development programs in Albania. NDI conducted civic education programs in cooperation with its Albanian partner organization, the Society for Democratic Culture (SDC). In addition, both NDI and SDC made significant contributions to Albanian electoral processes during this period.

With guidance from NDI, SDC designed and implemented a variety of civic awareness programs to help educate citizens and elected officials on such issues as the role of women in politics, local government administration and community organizing. SDC reached citizens across the country using nationwide television broadcasts, radio transmissions, public meetings and a monthly newsletter. Since 1992, it has consistently mobilized thousands of volunteers to monitor the election process.

Recognizing the need for public participation in the democratic system and dialogue on policy questions, NDI worked to foster communication among and between Albanian citizens and elected officials by conducting programs focusing on Members of Parliament, political party leaders and government officials. NDI's programming was significantly limited due to separate crises in 1997 and 1998, prompting the Institute to close its Tirana office on both occasions.

II. BACKGROUND

In March 1991, the long-ruling communist Albanian Party of Labor (PLA) prevailed in the first multi-party elections in Albanian history. One year later, in their second parliamentary contest, the Albanian people voted decisively against the communists, effectively removing them from government and embarking on a course of democratic reform and integration into the European and international communities. Representing an eclectic group of anti-communist interests, the Democratic Party (PD) prevailed in Albania's second multi-party elections in March 1992.

While former President Sali Berisha attempted to lay the groundwork for legal, social,

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and economic advancement at the beginning of his term, Albania's democratic transition during 1994-96 was marked by concerns that his administration was not operating in a completely democratic manner. These concerns intensified with the May 1996 parliamentary elections. Considerable controversy arose as a result of reports of widespread electoral irregularities and the Democratic Party's victory in 122 out of 140 seats in parliament. The serious flaws of the electoral process, as well as the government's intransigence in the ensuing weeks, demonstrated to many in the international community an apparent step backwards in Albania's democratization process.

In January 1997, widespread public anger at the country's leaders following the collapse of popular pyramid schemes unleashed an armed uprising. A loss of central authority occurred in most of the country, resulting in the resignation of the Democratic Party government. Early parliamentary elections in June followed the deployment of 6,000 troops by an Italian-led Multinational Protection Force and intensive electoral assistance provided by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The Socialist Party benefitted from strong anti-Democratic Party sentiment to win a decisive victory in these parliamentary elections. The new government succeeded in assuring many Albanians and the international community of its desire to launch necessary reforms, and moved immediately to restore order. While the Socialist Party made a positive gesture towards reconciliation by building a broad coalition government, its progress in introducing reforms was limited.

Similarly, the PD was not a constructive opposition. It boycotted parliamentary proceedings and held rallies in the capital that call for the resignation of the government and early elections. These actions hindered institutional reforms and the drafting of a new constitution. In particular, disagreements regarding the composition of the constitutional committee and which body should draft the constitution led to a prolonged stalemate. The Constitutional Committee eventually started its work, despite the fact that the PD continued not to participate. Former allies of the PD agreed to participate in the committee's work and the small Republican Party played an important role.

The political landscape throughout 1998 was dominated by the constitutional reform process, but there were several other important developments as well. Early in the year increasing violence in Kosovo sparked an influx of ethnic Albanian refugees into the northern Albanian region of Tropoja. In September 1998, a top PD leader was assassinated, prompting accusations that the murder was politically motivated. The renewed turmoil ultimately resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Fatos Nano who was replaced by Pandeli Majko, General Secretary of the Socialist Party.

Despite considerable political turmoil in 1998, the constitutional reform process in Albania culminated in a constitutional referendum on November 22. Although voter turnout was relatively low compared to recent years, the voters who did turn out to cast their ballots (some

50.6 percent of those eligible to vote) overwhelmingly approved the new charter in a poll considered by international observers to have been held without serious incident. The country's first democratic constitution was then signed into law by President Rexhep Meidani on November 28.

III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Political events during these past years have underscored the amount of work still needed to strengthen Albania's struggling democratic system. NDI's overall goals have been to increase citizens' understanding of democratic principles and their confidence in the electoral process; and to raise elected officials' awareness of their responsibilities to constituents. During this period, NDI's program in Albania consisted of technical and financial assistance to the Society for Democratic Culture, as well as assistance to government and party leaders in their attempts to introduce political reforms. Specific objectives of the program included:

Civic Education

- Increased citizens' awareness of and interest in the democratic process
- Enhanced management, educational, organizational, and sustainable capacties of SDC at the national and local levels.

Elections Programs

- Strengthened voter confidence during national and local elections, or bi-elections
- Increased voter turnout at and citizen awareness of, interest in, and involvement in elections

Parliamentary Communications

- Constructive dialogue among government officials and constituents on various pressing issues in Albania.

IV. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

A. Civic Education

In 1992, NDI helped establish the Society for Democratic Culture (SDC), an indigenous civic group comprising teachers, workers, engineers and students. SDC's first project was to mobilize more than 2,000 domestic observers for parliamentary elections in March 1992. The presence of these observers at polling sites throughout the country, combined with SDC's

independent vote count, played a significant role in assuring the public that it had, at last, freely expressed its will.

During the period covered in this report, NDI -- in cooperation with SDC -- sought to improve civic life in Albania by strengthening the role that citizens play in a democracy. In addition to focusing on the electoral process, NDI's and SDC's programs sought to link elected officials and their constituents in dialogue. SDC's mission of *Transparency, Tolerance and Understanding* has allowed the organization to maintain its focus and flexibility through a very tumultuous period in Albanian history.

Local Government

SDC conducted projects on a variety of important themes, including an effort to enhance the accountability and transparency of local government by helping citizens to understand local government structures and communicate with local officials. In 1994, SDC arranged town hall meetings during which citizens could voice their concerns to local officials about the community's problems. In 1995, SDC conducted an extensive civic education program focusing on the process of local government and the difficulties facing individual communities. The program involved a series of nationally televised programs on local government, public roundtable discussions held in cities around the country, the production of a citizen's guidebook explaining the duties and responsibilities of the various offices within the municipal government structure. The television series reached households across the country, helping to further the general public's understanding of the role and function of local government in Albania.

SDC also assisted local government officials in communicating with their constituents. In 1995, SDC distributed posters that provided municipal councils an opportunity to publicize open meetings. Through its network of clubs across the country, SDC shared information on the time and agenda of these meetings to enhance transparency and encourage public attendance. SDC also published and distributed three pamphlets (20,000 copies) describing the system of local government and the roles and responsibilities of local officials.

In 1996, SDC organized a workshop on, "Increasing the Participation of Citizens in the Governing Process." Elected local and national officials, NGO leaders and international trainers participated in a discussion on the importance of public participation and the duty of local officials to encourage it. Participants concluded that municipal councils and SDC branches need to increase collaboration; local media should play a greater role in publically announcing municipal council meetings; and municipal governments need to identify more appropriate venues to accommodate the public.

In 1997, SDC conducted a brief program to improve the communication skills of elected officials by holding a seminar and series of workshops that brought officials from the Ministry of Public Communication together with experts from the United States, Canada and Albania.

Youth Programs

In addition to local government programs, SDC worked to increase the awareness and involvement of youth in political processes as pertains to government addressing the needs and concerns of citizens. SDC established model student councils in two high schools in Tirana and Librazhd, and a university faculty in Tirana, with the goal of introducing students to democratic principles and offering them the possibility for active public involvement. SDC helped students draft the statutes needed to govern the councils' proceedings and prepared them for student elections. In 1996, NDI provided advice to SDC on completing a student government handbook describing student government structures, by-laws and committees to use in student councils and to provide background information to SDC staff. In 1998, students conducted photographic exhibitions highlighting their pride in Albania with SDC assistance.

Media Monitoring

SDC engaged in media monitoring since 1996. In March 1997, the organization launched its first nonelection period media monitoring effort to gauge government influence and media bias. The program monitored radio and television news, as well as four national newspapers. After the first week of monitoring, SDC organized a press conference and distributed a bulletin explaining the results, which showed a large focus on Kosovo and the national government. This press conference served to inform the public on the performance of the media in regards to the balance of topics mentioned. Journalists from all of the major newspapers, State and Radio TV and private stations attended the conference. Eight stations, both domestic and international, broadcast the conference for citizens. SDC released four additional bulletins and held a press conference to announce the close of the monitoring and the final results of the project.

The monitoring also extended to four independent newspapers (*Albania, Gazeta Shqiptare, Koha Jone* and *Dita Informacion - Shekulli*). Using such techniques as measuring time, column inches, topics covered and citations of parties and political leaders, SDC concluded that state media coverage has improved under the new government (as compared to coverage during the 1996 campaigns).

Constitutional Reform

SDC was instrumental in promoting public participation in the constitutional reform process throughout 1998. SDC produced a questionnaire distributed to the public in early 1998 designed to increase public understanding and input in the constitutional drafting process. The survey gathered information about public perceptions and concerns about the constitutional reform process, as the first step in its program of moderated discussion groups across the country.

The parliamentary Constitutional Commission invited SDC to outline its plans to increase public participation in the constitutional drafting process. SDC conducted a wide-ranging public

education campaign to inform citizens about constitutional issues. This five-month project began with a preliminary poll assessing citizens' knowledge of fundamental constitutional issues. The results of the poll, which were published widely, provided information into citizens' understanding and opinions in such key constitutional areas as human rights, local government, legislative power and executive power. SDC held five regional debates on constitutional topics followed by about 40 discussion sessions organized by SDC clubs.

SDC also published a series of pamphlets on legislative, judicial and executive powers; held public meetings in 12 districts; and produced televised debates offering legal expertise to the general public. SDC collected more than 2,000 forms with suggestions and remarks on the constitution and shared this information with a variety of domestic and international audiences. Supported by NDI, SDC produced 5000 copies of a poster explaining the procedure for voting on referendum day, and the Society engaged in a variety of other education efforts sponsored by additional donors.

Institutional Development Activities

Throughout NDI's relationship with SDC, the Institute has sought to increase the Society's institutional and financial independence through training seminars and study missions to other NGO's in the region.

Regionally, SDC has interacted with other democracy building organizations to trade methods on organizational development, leadership and moral support for working in the NGO sector. In July 1994, members of the SDC staff visited NDI's partner organization in Sofia, the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights (BAFECR). The trip exposed SDC to BAFECR's accounting and organizational techniques. In January 1996, SDC participated in NDI's regional 'Executive Leadership Meeting' in Macedonia. This exercise brought together representatives from six civic organizations in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to take part in workshops and discussions focused on clarifying their organizations' missions and designing activities to fulfill them. For the SDC, this proved an important opportunity to share experiences with other organizations in the region, particularly, BAFECR and the Macedonian Association for Civic Initiatives (ACI).

The Society worked to diversify its funding by conducting meetings with various potential sources of support such as the European Union and various West European embassies. Grant-writing is one of the most useful organizational skills the SDC gained as it attracted alternative funding sources. To this end, NDI conducted grant-writing training in 1995. Speakers included Lisa Davis, Director of ORT's Democracy Network program in Albania, and Johan TeVelde of the Dutch Development Organization.

SDC also produced a brochure in 1997, in both Albanian and English, for distribution to both domestic and international audiences, which summarized the Society's mission and outlined SDC activities, helping to increase awareness of SDC's role in Albanian society and exposure to

potential funders. The process of designing the brochure further helped the Society articulate its own purpose and objectives--a continuation of NDI's efforts begun during seminars for Society regional leaders at the end of January 1997 to encourage discussion within the Society about its mission and founding principles.

NDI conducted an organizational assessment of SDC in June 1998. This program allowed NDI and the group to identify and prioritize ways in which NDI could increase SDC's sustainability. Two NGO development experts from Bulgaria and the United States, Vera Dakova and Michael Groh, provided SDC with a substantive appraisal of its organizational strengths and weaknesses, set the stage for organizational improvement and persuaded SDC staff and volunteers of the importance of periodic assessments of this nature. In September 1998, 12 members of the SDC's national staff, executive council and branch clubs traveled to Macedonia in September to review the assessment results and draft an ambitious workplan through February 1999. SDC also began working on a two-year strategic plan centering on increasing the organization's sustainability.

B. Elections Programs

NDI and SDC have sought to increase voters' understanding of – and participation in – the electoral process since 1992. SDC's first project as an organization was to mobilize more than 2,000 observers for parliamentary elections in March 1992. The presence of these observers at polling sites throughout the country, combined with SDC's independent vote count, played a significant role in assuring the public that it had, at last, freely expressed its will. Since then, NDI and SDC have played major roles in all subsequent elections in Albania.

Early on in the period covered in this report, in October 1994, President Sali Berisha called for a constitutional referendum just one month in advance of the proposed polling date. SDC reacted quickly, by organizing a forum with political parties and citizens of the contents of the proposed Constitution. On referendum day, SDC mobilized 1,800 monitors and reached 40 percent of the polling sites.

May 1996 Parliamentary Elections

Not long after the failed constitutional referendum in mid-1995, NDI and SDC began planning in earnest for parliamentary elections that were anticipated in early 1996. In July 1995, NDI sent a pre-election survey mission (the first of three missions) to Albania. The team was comprised of James Tierney, former attorney general of Maine; Patrick Merloe, NDI Director of Elections Processes; Lisa McLean, NDI Senior Program Officer Resident in Bulgaria; and Alicia Allison, NDI's Resident Representative in Tirana. The two goals of the mission were to assess the political environment in which the elections would take place and to help SDC plan its elections program. After meeting with a broad array of political party representatives, government officials and journalists, the delegation concluded that there were grounds for concern in two main areas: the mechanics of election administration and the level of fairness in

which the election would take place. The group further noted past irregularities that detracted from public confidence in election results, including intimidation of monitors and government control over broadcast media.

Following the pre-election survey mission, NDI analyzed the election law and sent recommendations to members of parliament, President Sali Berisha, and the leadership of the major political parties. Recommendations included: extending the election calendar to allow candidates, voters, and elections administrators time to prepare adequately; updating and/or modifying the voter registration system; including all political forces in the creating of election zone boundaries; enhancing the secrecy of ballots cast in special voting facilities; establishing a permanent, independent election commission; requiring parties and candidates to disclose campaign contributions and expenditures; and clarifying language in the current election law the pertains to the media.

In late March 1996, NDI sponsored the second in a three-part series of pre-election assessment missions to Albania. The mission represented a collaborative effort between NDI, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Delegates of each of the three organizations met with government officials, political party leaders and members of the Society to accomplish the following objectives: 1) demonstrate international interest in the elections; 2) identify technical problems in election administration procedures; 3) offer practical advice to election officials; and 4) support ongoing civic education efforts related to the elections. The report and recommendations are appended.

With SDC, NDI assisted in the development of an election workplan which included opinion polling, media monitoring, voter education, volunteer recruitment, volunteer training and election observation. In January and February 1996, SDC sent delegates to observe and report on four separate political party roundtable discussions organized to discuss proposed changes to the election law.

SDC's comprehensive pre-election voter education program consisted of: 1) a series of candidate fora in cities throughout the country; 2) election law roundtables, which convened citizens and local level legal advisors, to discuss the recent changes to the election law; 3) the dissemination of "Get-Out-The-Vote" materials to 36 SDC clubs; and 4) a succession of media broadcasts on election-related topics.

As one facet of its voter education "Get-Out-The-Vote" efforts, SDC implemented three nationwide pre-election public opinion polls. These polls gaged public opinion regarding Albanian political figures and institutions, the current level of Albanian development, popular understanding of the election law and expectations regarding the conduct of the elections. National SDC leaders and volunteer advisors from NDI's partner organization in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights (BAFECR), provided technical assistance on devising the proper methodology for the polling project and assisted in training

SDC volunteers. The polls measured popular attitudes toward the future of Albania and determined issues of importance to the electorate.

In April and May 1996 , SDC also conducted a comprehensive media monitoring program to analyze the level of media access afforded the various political parties in the run-up to the elections in four cities throughout the country. The results, publicized by domestic and international media, demonstrated that the governing Democratic Party (PD) had received a disproportional amount of news coverage when compared to the opposition parties and the television news allocated a large percentage of its interviews and citations to government officials and representatives. SDC distributed a final analysis of its media monitoring program to members of the press.

On May 26, 1996, election day, despite difficulties encountered in receiving the proper credentials from election commission officials at the zone level, SDC mobilized thousands of volunteer observers to monitor the election proceedings and undertake a parallel vote tabulation (PVT). NDI organized 11 roving teams of international observers which visited polling sites throughout the country. On May 27, NDI representatives reconvened in Tirana for a debriefing. The number and type of irregularities noted by NDI's observers raised considerable concern about the integrity of the process and compelled NDI to issue a preliminary statement regarding the conduct of the election administration. SDC also issued a series of post-election statements which addressed the election proceedings and called for increased tolerance and dialogue in the tense post-election environment. SDC documented these election-day observations and media monitoring results in its final election report on the elections, released in July. In addition, SDC made regular statements to the media regarding the conduct of election preparation procedures, political party activity, the administration of the election and the May 28 post-election violence in Tirana's Skanderbeg Square. These press statements — as well as both NDI and SDC's bi-weekly election bulletins — kept the public informed on the transparency and fairness of the election campaign and of the election proceedings.

October 1996 Local Elections

NDI assisted SDC with activities related to the two rounds of local elections held on October 20 and October 27, 1996. During the pre-election period, the Society distributed 2,000 posters throughout the country and ran three weeks of radio spots informing citizens about the upcoming elections. Building upon its successful media monitoring program from the May elections, SDC tracked state-owned radio and television stations in order to measure compliance with new election law guidelines stipulating equal media access for all opposition parties. The media monitoring program concluded with a press conference following the second round of the elections at which the SDC released its report revealing significantly more equality in the coverage of the opposition and government parties during the October campaign period.

The Society mobilized more than 1,500 volunteers to observe both rounds of balloting. Following the elections, SDC released a final report summarizing the observations of its

monitors during both rounds of the elections.

In addition to supporting SDC's activities, NDI sent a 26-member international election observation delegation to monitor the elections. Following meetings with the Central Election Commission and party leaders in Tirana before the elections, NDI's delegation divided into 14 observer teams and deployed throughout the country. On election day, the teams monitored voting, vote counting and tabulation processes in approximately 200 polling stations. At a press conference in Tirana following the elections, the NDI delegation issued a preliminary statement in which it described the voting process as significantly improved over the May elections. However, the statement offered a more mixed assessment of the vote counting process based on reports by several delegation members of significant irregularities.

For the second round of the elections on October 27, eight NDI monitors coordinated with SDC members to observe the vote in 55 polling stations. They concluded that although the quality of the electoral process represented a significant improvement over May, it had declined from the level achieved during the first round. In December, NDI released its final report that expanded on its earlier statement and proposed specific recommendations for improvements to electoral procedures.

June 1997 Parliamentary Elections

In the wake of a popular uprising against the government over failed pyramid scheme investments, parliamentary elections were held in June 1997 in an attempt to restore stability to Albania. In mid-June, NDI sent a pre-election assessment mission to Albania which included former U.S. Congressman Sam Coppersmith. The delegation's report commented on the state of electoral preparations and voiced concern that a number of minimal conditions necessary for successful elections were yet to be put in place. The release of NDI's report came at an important time in the pre-election period. The report called upon Albanian leaders and the international community to double their efforts to complete this work and suggested that in the absence of certain minimum conditions on election day, a temporary delay might be preferable to the negative consequences resulting from a flawed electoral process. Through publicity surrounding the report's release in Tirana, NDI helped impress upon election administrators the importance of timely preparations.

As in past years, SDC prepared a full-range of activities for the June 29 parliamentary elections, despite the difficult conditions prevalent in most of Albania. Much of this pre-election program focused on a multi-faceted and nationwide public information campaign. SDC printed more than 10,000 posters designed to encourage voter turnout and provide voting procedure instructions. Working closely with the OSCE and the Multi-national Protection Force (MPF), the Society managed to distribute these posters widely, ensuring that they reached voters throughout the country. SDC also produced more than 20,000 voter education pamphlets providing instructions to voters on election-day procedures. The posters and pamphlets provide important information for a public which in many cases, especially given the limited of

communication and information available in the current situation, remains uninformed about the voting process.

SDC's nationwide media campaign included both radio and television spots that encouraged voter participation and stressed the importance of voting as a means for securing peaceful change. In conjunction with this campaign, and building upon the experience of the May and October 1996 election campaigns, SDC conducted its third media monitoring effort of both television and print coverage during the entire pre-election period.

NDI worked extensively with the Society to prepare its election-related program. Both NDI and SDC felt the need to focus primarily on ensuring SDC's capability to fulfill its primary role as an election monitoring organization. NDI brought Alina Inayeh, co-director of the Pro-Democracy Association in Romania, to Albania to conduct a series of monitor training sessions over a ten-day period in June. NDI's representatives trained representatives from clubs across the country in order to increase their ability to train local volunteers.

In addition to the pre-election activities, SDC fielded more than 1,000 monitors on election day to increase voter confidence in the voting process and in the election results. SDC observers, deployed across the country, also ensured that SDC voter education materials were present at polling sites, thereby providing important information for a public which in many cases remained uninformed about the voting process. Four NDI representatives were in Albania during the elections to support SDC's monitoring and to help the Society finalize its deployment plans and coordination efforts with regional clubs. For both rounds of the elections, three joint SDC/NDI observer teams deployed outside of Tirana as part of the OSCE/MPF operation. These teams contacted and supported SDC regional representatives in the Korce, Lezhe, Mirdita, Shkoder and Saranda. These teams coordinated closely with the OSCE monitors, providing additional strength to the international monitoring effort and underlining the value of close coordination between international and domestic monitors.

SDC held a press conference in Tirana following the second round of the elections to present the results of its monitoring, and confirm the international observers' message that, while there were numerous examples of isolated violations and administrative errors, the elections were generally acceptable. SDC also presented the findings of its comprehensive media monitoring effort and then published a final report that presented a comprehensive account of SDC's election activities and findings.

During the tense period between the end of the voting and the opening of the new National Assembly, NDI sent a post-election delegation to Tirana. In view of the difficult environment surrounding the elections and their aftermath, NDI felt that an immediate post-election delegation could make an important contribution by providing an impartial assessment of post-election conditions and assisting in resolving potential electoral disputes. Furthermore, NDI felt that a delegation could help identify urgent tasks for building public confidence in political and governmental processes following the elections.

June 1998 Local Elections and November 1998 Referendum

SDC monitored June 21, 1998 local elections held in seven municipalities and nine communes. It covered 134 of the 225 polling sites with 140 observers. SDC produced a statement reporting on its monitoring activities and the conduct of the elections. This statement was disseminated throughout Albania by the media and highlighted during a press conference. SDC also conducted a training of trainers on June 11 and distributed 5,000 copies of an educational leaflet about the elections. In an effort to educate the electorate about the candidates running, SDC held candidate forums in two municipalities during the week preceding the elections. Many of the clubs used the forums as an opportunity to collaborate with other local NGOs in order to increase turnout.

NDI supported SDC's training of trainers (TOT) seminars to prepare 1,400 election observers for monitoring the constitutional referendum in late 1998. This TOT approach served not only as a forum for educating, but also as a tool to increase communication among all SDC branch clubs and the central office as the referendum approached. SDC held a press conference on November 25, 1998 in which they presented a preliminary statement regarding the conduct of the referendum.

C. Public Communications

Throughout the communist period, political dialogue in Albania was a rarely practiced and sometimes life threatening endeavor. Government accountability and policy input from citizens was non-existent. Democracy's greatest strength--the participation of citizens in the decision-making process--was muted and undeveloped. Democratic institutions, such as the parliament, political parties and the mass media had to contend with rapid economic and social change while developing into institutionalized structures with distinct political functions. To complement NDI's work with SDC, the Institute implemented projects linking government officials with their constituents during this reporting period.

Parliamentary Communications

In this period covered by this report, NDI hosted the final two conferences of a three-part Parliamentary Communications series. This conference series was designed to address several of the major sectors that contribute to the communications process. In separate fora – one each for members of parliament, journalists, and NGO leaders – NDI brought international experts to Tirana to discuss the roles different institutions play in forming and articulating public debate.

To explore the role of the media in communications between parliament and the people, NDI organized a conference in December 1994 on "How to Cover the Legislative Process" for 40

print and broadcast journalists. Four international trainers participated in this working seminar[1], and addressed the following themes: the role of the media in the political process, journalistic ethics, fact vs. opinion, incentives for fair reporting, and reporting on the legislative process. The conference format was varied, and participants were presented with case studies, panel discussions, hands-on writing exercises and small group discussions.

In May 1995, a conference focusing on "NGOs and the Legislative Process" was attended by representatives of approximately 35 Albanian NGOs and a number of Members of Parliament, and addressed the role of NGOs in influencing the public debate. SDC worked alongside the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in order to research and analyze the level of organization in the Albanian NGO community while NDI's Resident Representative evaluated the topics that were of most interest and utility to these domestic organizations. NDI brought in four international advisors[2] – from Great Britain, Canada, and the United States – to facilitate the conference.

In 1997, following the pyramid scheme riots and July Parliamentary elections, NDI developed a concept paper outlining possible ways in which NDI might continue to work with parliamentary institutions to increase the effectiveness of the National Assembly and increase citizens' awareness of its activities -- especially during the constitutional drafting process beginning that fall. Immediately the Institute responded to the new parliamentary speaker's request to comment on the proposed parliamentary rules of procedure. NDI's rapid response to this request provided the National Assembly with detailed commentaries by experts from the U.S. House of Representatives, the California State Legislature, the German Bundestag and the Hungarian Parliament (See Appendix). These experts indicated areas in which omissions or lack of clarity and consistency in the rules might diminish the effectiveness with which the National Assembly fulfills its functions.

Constitutional Reform

NDI also contributed to the constitutional reform process throughout 1998. In February 1998, NDI sponsored a forum in Tirana bringing together political leaders from all the major

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[1]Elez Biberaj, Chief of Voice of America's Albanian Service; Shawn Hanson, Press Secretary for U.S. Representative Al Swift; Peter Lucas, political columnist for the *Boston Herald*; and Pauls Raudseps,Managing Editor of *Diena*, Latvia's first Western-style daily newspaper.

[2]Francesca Binda, Canada, Campaign Director for the Canadian Endangered Species Coalition; Felicien Brown, U.S.A., Lobbyist for the American Association of Retired Persons; Bernard Donoghue, U.K., Head of Campaigns and Public Affairs for SENSE, Britain's National Deafblind and Rubella Association; and Ty Goddard, U.K., Campaigns Coordinator for Scope, Britain's largest disability organization.

Albanian parties with Canadian, French and Polish[3] political figures who have been actively involved in constitutional negotiations in their countries. In this forum, which presented one of the rare occasions in which party leaders have met in the same room, speakers presented their countries' experiences and emphasized issues similar to those that Albania faces. Following the all-party forum, the NDI delegation met with leaders of the major parties separately to discuss in greater depth issues of particular concern to the individual parties.

NDI experts were responsible for two components of a workshop for Albanian constitutional drafters hosted by the Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (CEELI) in March 1998 in Washington, DC. Following up on the specific request by President Meidani for NDI assistance in this area, NDI led a discussion about issues to consider when including details of electoral systems in a constitution. In a separate part of the program, NDI led a discussion focused on the politics of negotiating a new constitution. NDI experts who had been involved in drafting the new South African constitution after the fall of apartheid rule provided details about tools such as sunset clauses and deadlock breaking mechanisms that had enabled South Africa to reconcile major differences between the two sides involved in the process.

NDI also worked with the Ministry for Legislative Reform to devise a media plan informing the public of key components of the proposed Constitution. NDI's work on the constitution was conducted in conjunction with ACCAPP, an OSCE commission coordinating assistance provided by international organizations on the constitutional reform process. NDI helped Minister Arben Imami and his staff to develop a strategy, draft a plan and implement a full schedule of print and broadcast education pieces. This initiative included such diverse activities as radio phone-in shows, public meetings and educational videos. NDI's planned assistance was significantly curtailed, however, due to evacuation in August 1998.

In addition to work with the Ministry, NDI consulted with members of parliament's Constitutional Commission on issues related to the constitutional drafting and adoption process. Consultations subsequent to the February 1998 conference had laid the groundwork for continuing engagement between NDI and the parties on how to overcome partisan politics in order to move forward on drafting a new constitution. The Institute also provided advice on the politics of constitution-making through frequent informal meetings throughout the constitutional reform process with political party representatives. These meetings included the dissemination of materials describing how other countries met the challenge of adopting new constitutions in partisan political environments.

In September 1998, NDI facilitated public meetings that helped educate citizens about

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[3]Hon. Francois Froment-Meurice, France, Councillor of State and former member of the French National Assembly; Hon. Ken Hughes, Canada, former Member of the Canadian Parliament and Constitutional Committee; and Hon. Jerzy Jaskiernia, deputy to the Sejm (Lower House) in Poland and former Minister of Justice.

issues related to the Constitution. Attended by Minister Imami and a number of legal scholars, these meetings provided citizens outside of the capital with an opportunity to ask questions about both the content of the constitution and the process by which it is being adopted. Strong media coverage helped extend these discussions to a much wider audience.

V. EVALUATION

Civic Education

Objective:

- Increase citizens' awareness of and interest in the democratic process by providing forums for them to communicate with elected officials

From pre-election candidate forums to local government initiatives to fielding citizen input on the constitutional reform process, SDC – with guidance from NDI – sought to engage Albanian citizens in the democratic process. SDC's continuing role as a citizen watchdog and public educator provides an important example of nonpartisan participation in the political process, especially as political leaders struggle with basic issues of representation and governance. This symbolic role has obtained greater attention as the country has contended with the loss of its initial democratic promise. Political leaders from both the Socialist and Democratic parties have recognized SDC as a mediator in their disputes and have occasionally sought its assistance and support. For example, SDC's constitutional program signaled a collaboration between the NGO and government sectors that would have been highly unlikely in previous years. These contacts represent a major shift in the awareness of the political elite of the role of independent civic organizations.

SDC's efforts in distributing information about Albanian civic life were innovative and practical. SDC's television series in 1995 were the first national broadcasts to explain local government to Albanian citizens since the fall of communism. In addition to informing the public, the programs opened a dialogue among members of different constituent groups on how to best prioritize and address problems of sanitation, illegal construction and the supply of water and electricity. The programs also gave officials an opportunity to explain the administrative and technical difficulties they face in their work. Later in 1998, SDC's civic education initiative produced a contact information handbook of local government officials. SDC's efforts in media monitoring, public opinion polling and election monitoring have proven valuable in the Albanian post-communist era establishing SDC's reputation as an unbiased and practical information resource center. Finally, SDC's efforts in developing civic education programs with youth underline the organization's commitment to Albania's future leaders and citizens.

Objective:

- Strengthen the management, educational, organizational, and sustainable capacties of SDC at the national and local levels

NDI's efforts with SDC in creating a professional organization have proven beneficial as the Society has become one of the most prominent civic organizations in Albania. SDC's management developed throughout the reporting period through various leadership training sessions and accounting training. SDC's reporting capacity has expanded as the organization manages donor relationships with an assortment of international benefactors. SDC efforts in branch development, assisted by frequent visits to sites by NDI Resident Representatives, improved the organizations reputation as a truly nationwide network of volunteers and members. Through its programs and newsletter *Vizion* (later to become TMT), SDC successfully manages and maintains communications and educates its members.

The ability to remain organized and coordinated through significantly unstable periods in 1997 and 1998 underline SDC's effectiveness and impact in Albania. For example, as Albanian citizens recuperated from armed insurrections in March, SDC relied on its nation-wide network to mobilize 1,500 monitors for the June 1997 elections. During non-election periods, NDI and SDC's collaborative efforts in developing strategies to become self-sustainable and attractive to international donors resulted in an organization wide assessment of SDC and a framework to develop a strategic plan. SDC's success in diversifying its funding base allowed the organization to increase the volume of programmatic activities and displayed its valuable ability to attract multiple donors.

Elections Programs

Objective:

- Strengthen voter confidence during national and local elections, or bi-elections
- Encourage voter turnout and increase citizen awareness of, interest in, and involvement in elections as a concrete expression of citizen participation in the democratic process

NDI and SDC's election related activities were respected throughout the international community as fair and accurate. NDI's pre- and post-election missions underlined the Institute's commitment to the election process in Albania as it relates to democratic development as a whole. NDI's pre-election consultations and assessments had an impact on on the conduct of elections in --in 1996, NDI's assessment mission cautioned that the electoral system as flawed and susceptible to fraud. NDI concurred with the European Union (EU) and OSCE that these parliamentary elections were indeed fraudulent and represented a step backward in Albanian democracy. The international community saw encouraging signals of improvement in the 1997 Specific recommendations contained in NDI's final report helped domestic and international groups promote further improvements in the law in advance of Albania's future elections. The EU Commission, for example, has cited NDI's recommendations as a factor in its decision to consider technical assistance designed to improve Albania's system of voter registration.

SDC's ability to provide important, timely and often exclusive information to Albanian citizens and the international community, to educate citizens of the importance of their vote and to mobilize thousands of volunteer observers on election day, demonstrated the continued need for a non-partisan, civic education and election monitoring organization in Albania. In addition to illustrating the continued strength of SDC's organization, the Society's highly visible monitoring presence at each election played an important role in encouraging voter turnout and in increasing public confidence in the process and its results. The combined NDI/SDC monitor teams provided support to a number of regional clubs and helped underline for them the importance of their local efforts.

Parliamentary Dialogue

Objective:

- Promote a more constructive dialogue between government officials and their constituents on various pressing issues in Albania

NDI's efforts in linking Albanian citizens with their elected officials have been timely and useful. After the March 1997 riots, NDI's extension of assistance to the National Assembly on constituent outreach provided elected officials the opportunity to interact with a disaffected electorate. These activities also succeeded in addressing Albanian political partisanship in bringing opposing parties to the same table--NDI's March 1998 conference was the first such multiparty event since the opposition began its parliamentary boycott. NDI's efforts were also applauded by the Albanian political community as highly effective. Comments on the Parliament's Rules of Procedure provided by NDI's panel of experts provided timely expertise that was reflected in subsequent versions of the rules, as confirmed in letters to NDI from the Albanian President and parliamentary leadership (See Appendix).

NDI's efforts in the constitutional reform process were significantly curtailed by the August 1998 evacuation of international staff. Aside form providing expert advice in the Constitution drafting process, NDI was able to provide advice and exchange ideas with Minister Imami and top officials involved with communicating institutional reforms to the public. NDI's consultations helped lead to a blueprint strategy to build public consultations into the constitutional reform process.

VI. CONCLUSION

Events over the past years have underscored the amount of work still needed in strengthening Albania's faltering democratic system. The dynamics of recent crises confirmed for NDI the need to help raise elected officials' awareness of their responsibilities to constituents and

to increase citizens' understanding of democratic principles and their confidence in the electoral process.

SDC's continuing role as a citizen watchdog and public educator provides an important example of nonpartisan participation in the political process, especially as political leaders struggle with basic issues of representation and governance. This symbolic role has obtained greater attention as the country has contended with the loss of its early democratic promise. Political leaders from both the Socialist and Democratic parties have recognized SDC as a mediator in their disputes and have occasionally sought its assistance and support. These contacts represent a major shift in the awareness of the political elite of the role of independent civic organizations.

The increasing independence and sustainability of SDC has allowed the Institute to pursue separate yet complementary programming, including NDI's parliamentary communications seminar series, and the Institute's contribution to the electoral and constitutional reform processes. Together, SDC and NDI have made important contributions to Albania's ongoing transition to democratic governance.

Appendices
ALBANIA: CIVIC EDUCATION AND PARLIAMENTARY TRAINING
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EUR-A-00-94-00028-00
April 1, 1994 to June 30, 1999

1. NDI Trip Report to Albania, December 1994
2. NDI Trip Report to Albania, May 1995
3. Pre-Election Report, April 1996
4. *NDI Election Watch,* Bi-Weekly Bulletin
5. NDI Final Report, "Albanian Local Elections", October 1996
6. Society for Democratic Culture Final Report on the October 1996 Elections
7. NDI Pre-Election Delegation Statement on the 1997 Albanian Parliamentary Election, June 1997
8. Society for Democratic Culture Final Report on the June 1997 Elections
9. NDI Interim Report on the Proposal to Revise the Rules of Procedure
10. Letter from Albanian President Rexhep Meidani

11. Letter from Albanian Deputy Speaker Namik Dokle

12. Society for Democratic Culture Final Report on Local Election Observation, June 1998

13. Society for Democratic Culture Two-Year Activity Report, January 1997

14. Society for Democratic Culture Two Year Activity Report, 1997-1999

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